

South Willamette Area Concept Plan

October 30, 2012

REPORT: URBAN DESIGN WORKSHOP # 4 and ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Event Information

Event: Urban Design Workshop
Focus: Streetside Character, Building Elements
Time: 30 October 2012; 6:00 – 8:00 PM
Location: Hilyard Community Center, 2580 Willamette Street
Facilitation: City of Eugene Planning Division
Patricia Thomas, Robin Hostick, Carolyn Burke, Terri Harding, Nan Laurence, Jennifer Knapp,
Chris Henry, Rob Inerfeld, Anne DeLaney and William Ellis
Attendees: Approximately 37 community members

Workshop Questionnaire

Respondents: 24 (included in the 37 attendees noted above)

Online Questionnaire

Duration: October 30 – December 11

Respondents: 59

OVERVIEW

The City of Eugene Planning Division hosted a public workshop to further explore ways to guide potential future development and redevelopment in the South Willamette district. The district is defined generally as the area between 23rd and 32nd Avenues from the base of College Hill to Amazon Park. Several previous workshops have been held to discuss the development of a concept plan for the district. The purpose of this workshop was to review the October 2012 Revised Draft Concept Plan and to study and discuss a range of urban design options for Design Elements and Street-side Character. In addition to being presented at the workshop, the presentation was available to the community online along with a questionnaire to provide feedback.

ADVERTISEMENT

The workshop and the associated online presentation and questionnaire were publicized together with the South Willamette Street Improvement Plan through the following means:

- 1300 postcards sent to residents, businesses and property owners in the district
- Email invitations sent to over 560 people on the project Interest list
- Announcements were sent through the following online newsletters:
 - Neighborly News to Neighborhood Leaders
 - Southeast Neighbors
 - Crest Drive Neighbors
 - American Institute of Architects, Southwest Oregon Chapter
 - Friendly Area Neighborhood Board
 - Southtowne Business Association
- The workshop was announced in the City/Region section of the Register Guard preceding the event.



- The workshop was included in the City Manager’s Office public meetings calendar
- The workshop invitation was included on the city’s South Willamette Area Plan web page.
- All notices of the workshop alerted people who could not attend to see the presentation online, posted the day of the event, and to fill out a questionnaire to provide input.

PRESENTATION

The presentation was divided into two parts with table discussion and exercises after each. The first section provided a brief history of the project, presented the October 2012 Revised Concept Plan and included information about building elements, transitions and tools for implementing better design. Part two focused on street-side character and looked at conditions on Willamette Street and possible phased changes.

Part 1

A brief recap of the project introduced changes to the revised Draft Concept Plan:

- Lowering the height of most of the district from seven stories with a four story step-back to five stories with a 3 story step-back.
- Determining specific areas for row houses rather than allowing row houses throughout the single-family options zone.
- Introduction of a multiple family zone with apartments and condos that have “row house character.”
- Proposing an alternative for the Willard School site in case it is not redeveloped by 4J as a school.
- Focus areas of high-density housing were removed

Mixed use building design elements were introduced and illustrated with photos featuring design features such as:

- Large ground floor windows
- Façade treatments - articulation and material changes
- Permanent awnings
- Lighting design

Street features for mixed use areas were illustrated with elements such as:

- Planter strips & street trees
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- District identity
- Street & site furnishing

Residential building design elements were discussed and illustrated for multi-family and single-family options.

Transition zone design tools were described and an example illustrated a higher intensity use adjacent to a single-family residence. Tools included:

- Lowering the overall height or creating a step-down
- Breaking up the building mass and wall planes by articulating the walls and layering materials
- Sloped or compatible rooflines
- Landscaped screening

An overview of implementation tools for “making better design happen” included:

- Visioning and creating higher expectations for design quality
- Incentives for design excellence
- Regulations

Part 2

The second part of the presentation looked more closely at the details of street-side character.

Willamette Street was used as an example to introduce the concept of private, semi-public, and public realms.

Photo examples of streets in Eugene with 9 foot wide street-side area (sidewalk plus landscaping between curb and building face) were presented. The typical existing condition along Willamette Street includes 9 feet from curb to the property line. Each example identified a unique condition and looked at options for utilizing the space in order to create comfortable areas for desired activities and improving the pedestrian experience. These included:

- Options for buffering pedestrians from the street
- Possibilities for dividing the space between curb and face of buildings
- On-street parking
- Building set-back options
- Creating opportunities for activity, such as café tables or merchandizing in front of stores

A visual review of conditions on Willamette Street and possible phased changes were described. Illustrations depicted:

- Current conditions
- Interim conditions
- A future scenario within the existing R.O.W.

Additional options were also outlined but with the understanding that more space would be necessary. These included:

- Increased buffering with On-Street Parking or Wider Planter Strips
- Wider sidewalks
- More space for cafes, street merchandising, etc.
- A cycle track

Additional street-side character examples were also presented for:

- Commercial side-street
- Multi-family
- A shopping alley
- Single-family

Parking concepts were outlined and illustrated with a diagram of nine types of shared parking possibilities.

TABLE EXERCISES

Participants gathered around five large tables with two facilitators each, a flip chart for notes and several illustrations supporting the discussion.

The October 2012 REVISED Draft Concept Plan "Places for Business & Living" map, illustrates the following changes:

- Reduced height of Mixed Use to three stories along the street stepping back to five stories
- Allowing Mixed Use further south along Willamette Street
- Instead of allowing Row Houses in *all* Single Family Options (SFO) areas, limit this option only to a few specific areas
- Requirement for Row House character at certain apartment and condo areas,
- Show a conceptual plan for the Willard School site in the event it is no longer a school.

Questions for Round 1:

1. Do the revisions to the proposed "Places for Business & Living" better meet the needs of the community?

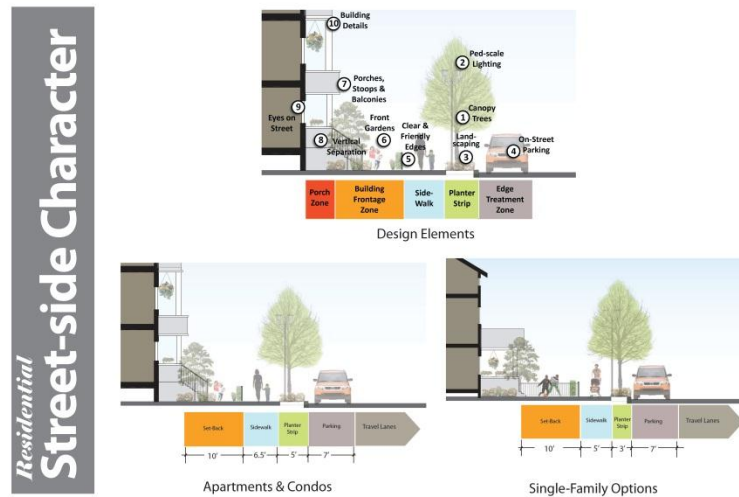
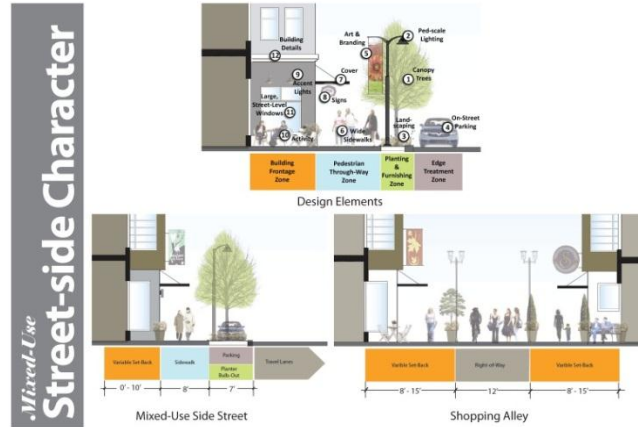


2. Do the proposed design elements reflect the long-term needs of the community?

- Mixed use areas (building form, street frontage)
- Residential areas (apartments/condos, single family options)

- Apartments & Condos

- Single Family Options



2. Which, if any, other options should we consider for Willamette Street?



3. Do the parking design options meet the long-term needs of the area?



CONCLUSION SUMMARY: Workshop and Online Questionnaire

This summary of conclusions is drawn from discussion at the October 30th workshop as well as from 83 responses to the questionnaire, available at the workshop and online until December 11th. Workshop participants and online viewers of the presentation provided input on the revised concept plan and new design concepts. Overall, responses to the **October 2012 Revised Draft Concept Plan** and **new design concepts for streetside character and building elements** proposed in the presentation were generally favorable. Detailed analysis and a summary of results of each element of the Concept Plan are provided below. Additional analysis and a full list of comments can be seen online in the “Questionnaire Results” and “Detailed Comments.”

Places for Business and Living Plan

The changes reflected in the October **Places for Business and Living Plan**, as described in the workshop, resulted from public input and analysis of the June 2012 version of the concept plan, including:

- lowering the proposed building height to five stories throughout most of the commercial district,
- allowing mixed-use further south on Willamette St.,
- limiting row houses to certain streets in the single family areas, rather than allowing them throughout the single-family option areas,
- removing designated locations for higher-density apartments and condos, and finally,
- showing a specific concept for the Willard School site in the event it is no longer a school in the future.

Based on responses to the questionnaire, there is significant support for the changes reflected in the October plan.

Building heights generated the most comment and discussion. The topics receiving the most favorable comments during the table discussions were the proposed lower building height, introduction of specific row house areas and removing the taller high-density apartments and condos. A number of workshop participants and questionnaire respondents commented they still favored some taller apartments and condos in select areas, as had been proposed in previous plans, along Amazon Parkway and near the LTD station at 29th Avenue. Some respondents feel the lower densities do not adequately respond to opportunities created near Amazon Park, the existing large community park, and near future, high-frequency transit stations along Amazon Parkway. From both a market and equity standpoint (providing more people with access to recreation, services and transportation) these opportunities occur near the parkway intersections with 24th, 27th and 29th Avenues. Others continue to feel that limited, taller buildings (towers) can provide efficient housing with acceptable impact to the surrounding area.

Several respondents expressed concern about allowing five stories along Willamette St. north of 24th Avenue, as this stretch currently provides a sense of a gateway to the area and defines the eastern edge of College Hill. The proposed concept plan attempts to balance the *existing* designation and zoning for “limited high density residential” uses up to 50 feet in height along Willamette Street, with a desired *future* form that steps building forms down at the perimeters where adjacent to lower densities (single family). The Concept Plan proposes a maximum five story building height that drops to three stories to the west as well as establishing a three story height limit, in the form of a “stepback.” along the street edge of these sites.

Another suggestion was to swap the proposed uses along the west side of Portland Street between 24th and 25th Avenues with those from 25th Avenue and Woodfield Station to put the more intensive use toward the south by the Woodfield Station shopping center. Though there is logic to this proposal, the *existing* zoning allows medium density residential on the northern end of the street and low density residential on the southern. To address compatibility in the *future*, a row house character is proposed for both, yet that can be in the form of an apartment or condo building on the north end. To address the transition to the nearby single family neighborhood the row house area can be treated with building form height limitations in the final plan.

The **Connections and Open Space** map although not discussed as thoroughly as the plan map received positive feedback at the workshop. A desire for more pocket parks, plazas, and shared areas within the “hardscape” was generally expressed. The plan shows some possibilities for activity areas but there was a feeling that more specific spaces should be designated now to ensure that those areas are retained during future development in the district. Due to the difficulties of designating private property for public use (typically it must be purchased first), options are limited to accommodate this desire in the near term. A potential solution would be to establish clear acquisition criteria and budget for purchasing and improving property for public open space as an implementation measure of the concept plan. In addition, a program of strong incentives or partnerships could help promote public, semi-public and semi-private open space.

Building Design Elements and Street-side Character (new concepts):

Examples for each street type, “mixed-use” (such as Willamette Street), “side street mixed-use,” “apartment and condo” streets and “single family option” streets, were provided. The concepts for design elements and street-side character drew a positive response.

Willamette Street drew the broadest range of comments due to the complexity of the multiple goals for the street and sidewalk areas. The “mixed use” design and character elements were generally supported but recognized as difficult to achieve. The narrow right-of-way and the on-going Willamette Street Improvement Project generated much table discussion with certain elements considered “trade-offs” for other features within the limited space. Respondents commented that it is important to develop the design of the street-side character of Willamette Street closely in concert with the Willamette Street Improvement Project. As discussed in the workshop, a **unified vision** is needed to support decision-making about the effect and integration of the short term options into the long term vision for the street.

If the future vision for the street includes either increasing the right-of-way or a deeper setback in front of buildings, **widened sidewalks** were the most favored amenity to incorporate. **Bike lanes or a cycle track** were also rated highly. **Wider planter strips**, to increase safety and separate pedestrians from the busy street, were also favored. More room for cafes, street-side merchandising and semi-public spaces drew support to increase walkability and attract pedestrians to the street. **“Simple beautification,”** such as landscaping and **removing utility poles**, were also supported. The concept of **on-street parking** received the most negative comments, in part because it was still seen as a “trade-off” with bike lanes, and due to concern that it would slow traffic and reduce safety. With these multiple goals to consider, the Concept Plan process offers an opportunity to develop a vision that can be implemented incrementally. The shorter term Willamette Street Improvement Project changes will need to work in concert with (perhaps as a first phase of) the desired, long-term character of Willamette Street as a walkable business and living district.

Side Street Commercial, Apartments and Condos: Questionnaire responses to proposed building elements and street-side character for single family options, apartments and condos, and side-street commercial, (for example, breaking up building masses, accentuated windows, and adding semi-public spaces) strongly trended toward “close enough”. Specific concerns were raised about the cost of constructing the features and providing adequate parking for apartments and condos, in particular concern that higher costs may render redevelopment financially infeasible. Regarding parking, concerns reflect both the potential cost of structural solutions to parking needs as well as concerns from residents that adequate parking is needed to prevent parking demand from being displaced onto neighborhood streets.

Shopping Alley: The shopping alley concept was well received as a strong idea during the table discussions; though concern was raised about the effect of closure of a vehicular area to traffic and its effect on businesses. The shopping alley was the most highly rated concept in the questionnaire. Comments included, “Love it!”, “...a green space & gathering space,” and “everyone likes shopping alley.” During table discussions, participants commented that public and semi-public areas around buildings be considered as places to gather and encourage neighborliness.

Single Family Options: Regarding street-side character for the single family options areas, a respondent noted that the area is currently “a wonderful pocket of relatively inexpensive houses on nice quiet streets” that should not be forced into redevelopment. No provisions of the plan will force any type of development; rather it is intended to provide flexibility for current and future owners to create housing options to accommodate the natural expected growth of the area while still using single family housing forms.

Transitions, between building types and uses: Techniques for improving compatibility continued to raise concerns during the table discussions. Many questionnaire respondents felt the compatibility proposals were “close enough” but more felt the concept “needs more work” with only a few feeling the techniques proposed were “just right.” Most concerns were raised in zones where the highest intensity uses abutted single-family zones. Some individual comments suggested that transitions occur across a whole property, such as using row houses as an intermediate scale to transition between apartments and single family house types. Another transition that was recommended was to use parking areas combined with landscaping as a method to separate more intense building types from smaller buildings. And a further concept suggested is to use the street to separate one use type from another. Also, interest was expressed in strong regulatory tools being applied to these zones. Each of these concepts was incorporated in the **Draft Concept Plan** and can be further explored in the final draft.

Parking Options: The range of parking concepts was the most controversial topic in the workshop. More questionnaire respondents selected “needs more work” on the parking options than for any other question; however, comments revealed the general perception that support for on-street parking would eliminate the possibility of bike lanes. The “either/or” perception, while helpful and revealing, is an unintended artifact of the question, as options for accommodating both may be explored. Interest was expressed in shared parking and “tuck under” parking accessed behind buildings as well as maintaining some parking spaces directly adjacent to businesses.

Summary Data: The following data summarizes the level of support in questionnaire results for the October Draft Concept Plan and for the new concepts presented. The questionnaire included thirteen questions. Response options were: *“about right,” “close enough” or “needs more work.”*

Positive responses (including the “close enough” or “about right” categories) were registered by three quarters of respondents for ten of the thirteen questions, by two thirds for one question, and approximately half for the remaining two questions. The specific response percentages are provided below:

Response**Question**

Questions below ask if the proposals “meet the long term needs of the community” or the “needs of the community as a whole.”

“Absolutely to Mostly”**67%**

The Revised Draft meets the needs of the community as a whole?
(Remainder answered “somewhat”; none answered “not at all.”)

**“about right” or
“close enough”****74%**

“Places for Business and Living Map”: Changes better meet the long term needs

75%

Mixed Use Street Frontages and Building Design Elements meet the long term needs

72%

Mixed Use Building Form and Design of Street-side Character meet the long term needs

83%

Mixed Use Side Street Street-side Character meets long term needs

88%

Shopping Alley: Street-side Character meets long term needs of the area.

82%

Apartments and Condos: Building Design Elements meet the long term needs

85%

Apartments and Condos: Street-side character meets the long term needs

68%

Transition Concepts appropriate to help improve compatibility?

86%

Single Family Options: Building Design Elements meet the long term needs

77%

Single Family Options: Street-side Character meets the long term needs of the area

58%

Willamette Street: Street-side Character meets the long term needs of the district and business

48%

Parking Design Options: The concepts meet the long term needs of the district

Next Steps:

The conclusions and input above will be evaluated for integration into the upcoming final draft concept plan to be presented to the Eugene Planning Commission and a Public Forum in early 2013.